

# Steel Magnolias

## Scrapbook

Memories of Movie Making in a Small Town

Edited by: Tom Gresham, Jerry Pierce and Tom Whitehead

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NSU Press  
Northwestern State University  
Natchitoches, Louisiana

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# Acknowledgments

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As I was putting together *Steel Magnolias Scrapbook*, someone made the statement that it must be terribly difficult to publish a book. My answer was something to the effect that it was really a matter of coordinating many small tasks to ensure that they all get done in the proper order and on time.

Later, I thought about it more, and although it certainly is true that much of the job of publishing is one of coordinating many small projects, that doesn't say enough. To successfully bring a book idea to the finished product requires the work and help of many people, and as I considered the "difficulty" of publishing, it was the help of all those people that came to mind.

*Steel Magnolias Scrapbook* required us to work in several arenas: 1. The traditional publishing field with its attendant tasks, 2. The university setting, where the people who are helping have other tasks as their primary responsibilities, 3. The Hollywood connection, where we were completely dependent upon the help of others, and 4. The local public, which responded so well.

There is the chance that in listing some who helped I will forget someone. To anyone I have forgotten, it was an accident, and I apologize in advance.

This book could not even have been attempted without the blessing and help of the good people at Rastar, Tri-Star, and Columbia Pictures. They made available photos and put us in touch with the ever-mobile actors. Don Safran and Robin Green at Rastar, you always called back or returned our FAX messages, despite the pressures of working with several films at any given moment. (Photos not credited are courtesy of Rastar/Tri-Star.) Dr. Robert Alost, President of Northwestern State University, stood firmly behind the publishing of *Steel Magnolias Scrapbook* through some rough financial times. Dr. Ed Graham, Vice President at NSU, so adept at keeping things on track, thanks.

Robert Harling, despite a whirlwind schedule working on three films, you took time to write the introduction. Thanks, Bobby. Jerry Pierce and Tom Whitehead both worked with the film crew during the summer of '88, and their knowledge of the people and events were invaluable at almost every turn. Professional photographers John C. Guillet and Adrian Demery shared their photos for use in this book. *The Natchitoches Times* came through with some great photos. Dr. Bill Long at NSU wrote the section titled "Natchitoches: The Real Chinquapin." Lane Crockett allowed us to reprint his stories from *The Shreveport Times*. And thanks to my wife, Pat, for helping with the production work.

For hosting the film, for putting up with interruptions in their daily lives, for treating the crew and cast to a steady dose of Southern hospitality, and for sharing hundreds of their photos for use in this book, I especially thank the wonderful people of Natchitoches.

Tom Gresham  
Director, NSU Press

# Introduction

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When I was in my teens and early twenties, I traveled alot . . . whenever and wherever I could. On these travels, I used to buy all the trinkets and tourist paraphernalia that I could get my hands on. I'd be so loaded down with stuff, I could hardly walk through customs. Then one day, someone much older and wiser said to me, "Why burden yourself with all that garbage?" I told her this stuff wasn't "garbage." These were souvenirs . . . things to help me remember my good experiences. The friend laughed at me. She said that was nonsense. All these objects, she explained, were basically useless.

"That kind of junk," she went on, "gets broken, gets lost. All you need are your memories . . . they're the only things that can never be damaged or stolen." At the time, that sounded a little too boringly philosophical to me. But after living through what I've lived through the past couple of years, I have to admit, she's right. Memories are the most important thing.

Other playwrights have made me aware of what a singular experience I've had. What's happened to me with *Steel Magnolias* has never happened to anyone else. I wrote a very personal story about a community I love. Its success as a play exceeded

anyone's wildest dreams. It was sold to become a motion picture. That motion picture was then cast with the most remarkable collection of actors imaginable. Then, the producer decided to shoot the film in and amongst the community I love . . . the community that inspired the story in the first place. You have to admit, as far as experiences go . . . it's been pretty swell.

The filming of *Steel Magnolias* was an experience for Natchitoches, as well. The summer of '88 will always be remembered as a time of special magic. Not just the Hollywood kind, but the kind of magic that happens with new relationships, new adventures, new encounters. We'll all have the two hour motion picture to share . . . but we'll also have all those special private moments that belong to only us. The photographs on these pages serve to capture many things besides Sally, Dolly, Shirley, Daryl, Olympia, Julia, Tom, Sam, Herbert, and Ray. There's also joy, surprise, love, embarrassment, fatigue, friendship, sadness, laughter . . . everything that went into the making of *Steel Magnolias*.

This is not a book of pictures . . . it's an experience .

**Robert Harling**  
**August 1989**

# Special Relationships

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by Jerry Pierce

The making of *Steel Magnolias*, like the story itself, was a fascinating study in unique and memorable relationships.

Filming of the picture by Hollywood giants in a small, remote town created a broad and bright montage showing the lives of diverse people and places becoming closely intertwined.

Those vivid images will linger as a permanent backdrop to the movie in the minds and hearts of the people who were a part of this extraordinary experience that began with whispers in the springtime that Hollywood might be coming to Natchitoches and ended with emotional farewells as autumn approached.

It was hardly surprising that the residents of a little North Louisiana town with a population of 20,000 or so would accept with enthusiasm and excitement the 200 “movie people” who began pouring into the community in late June to film *Steel Magnolias*.

The picture was special to Natchitoches, of course, because it was written by a Natchitoches playwright and inspired by a local family. There was also no doubt that the project would be an economic blessing to a region that was gripped by a relentless recession.

This was also a town that still clung to faint but pleasant memories of movie-making. Some long-time residents had watched John Wayne and William Holden filming *The Horse Soldiers* here three decades earlier, and even those who were not born at the time had heard

stories of Natchitoches’ link with the motion picture industry.

So the warm feelings that Natchitoches folks had for the cast and crew were understandable, but the “movie people” — especially the stars — were probably not anticipating the affection and attachment that they would come to feel for Natchitoches and its people.

Members of the movie company’s advance team — those who were sent to Louisiana early to coordinate plans for the filming — acknowledged that they were overwhelmed by the concerted assistance and cooperation of the community.

Northwestern State University provided a building for a sound stage and production offices. Local residents agreed to move from luxury homes that would be leased to stars and other personnel. Most business people, public officials and property owners were not just willing but eager to provide filming locations for the picture.

Those and other extensive efforts to accommodate the movie people reflect the spirit and character of a community that is widely recognized for its warmth and hospitality and the genuine kindness and compassion of its people.

The movie people soon sensed that mystique, and they became comfortable in Natchitoches. At first, the stars were whisked under heavy security in and out of makeshift studios, rehearsal facilities and chauffeur-driven vehicles. But they quickly melded with people in the community as other movie representatives had done from the start.



It was not unusual to see Sally Field with her baby grocery shopping late at night or at a discount store on days off from filming. Shirley MacLaine liked to swim behind her house on Sibley Lake, visit the local yogurt shop and rent films from a video store.

Dolly Parton had many of her evening meals at a lakefront restaurant in Natchitoches, and she sang with the Northwestern band at halftime of a football game. Olympia Dukakis met with local citizens to offer advice on community theatre projects. Daryl Hannah often asked some Natchitoches friends to take her water skiing.

Julia Roberts and Dylan McDermott enjoyed late, dark corner dinners at a quiet restaurant on “the strip” in Natchitoches. Tom Skerritt went bass fishing and zipped around town on a bicycle. Local ladies who frequented a trendy cafe on the town’s brick-paved main street had their pictures made with him.

Johnathan Ward found an antique car near Natchitoches that had been restored, purchased it and hired someone to drive it back to California for him. Several of the stars and other movie people spent their Sundays off at the horse races at Louisiana Downs an hour away.

Other prominent movie people blended into the community. Producer Ray Stark fell in love with Natchitoches, and the feeling was mutual. He put awe-struck admirers at ease by telling them, “Just call me Ray.” He jetted West Coast colleagues in to show off the town. He liked the local food and requested and received a gallon of marinade that was used on a spicy chicken dish he enjoyed.

Director Herbert Ross and Lee Bouvier Radziwill, whom he would marry soon after the picture was completed, rode bicycles along quiet back streets and went boat riding and water skiing on Cane River.

Crew members started joining local people on Wed-

nesday evenings at a little nightclub to learn the two-step, cotton-eyed joe and other country-western dances. Ray Stark liked the place and rented it and the club’s band for the wrap party when filming ended.

Designers, artists and set decorators paid several hundred dollars for everything an Episcopal church had to offer at a charity rummage sale, used a few of the items as props and donated what they had bought — plus much more — back to the church when they left town.

Cast and crew members often had home-cooked Louisiana meals with people in the community, and local residents were frequently invited to sample California cuisine at the temporary homes of personnel who worked on *Steel Magnolias*.

Some of the movie people brought their youngsters to Natchitoches for the summer, and the kids participated in summer camps, soccer, baseball and other organized recreational activities with local children.

As a publicist for the picture stated in a media interview during filming, the cast and crew “were happy to be among people who made them feel like family.”

In many ways, it was difficult to separate movie people and townspeople. Hundreds from Natchitoches and surrounding communities worked on the picture in construction and security, as production assistants, clerical personnel and in other capacities.

When calls went out for extras and stand-ins, the response was overwhelming. The scores who were selected gladly worked the grueling, 12-hour days the filming schedule demanded. Financial compensation was minimal, but they got close-up looks at the stars and at movie-making. Many will see themselves in the picture.

*Steel Magnolias* was a financial windfall for some in the community, where virtually everyone felt the positive ripple effect on the economy.

A laundry and dry cleaning operation that normally closed at 5 p.m. began staying open all night to serve the production company. The manager of a hardware and lumber company said he made his first sale of aircraft cable that had been in the store for years, and the movie people ordered thousand-board loads of plywood.

For Stars Catering, which served the cast, crew and extras two meals a day out of a kitchen in a customized 18-wheeler, spent \$15,000 a week at local grocery stores. A grocer said he had to stock a number of new items, including Russian caviar and some herbs and spices he could not pronounce.

The production company provided matching luxury motor homes for the stars and top personnel, and several dozen other vehicles were leased for the filming. Local service stations kept the cars and trucks fueled up and serviced.

A Natchitoches resident who bakes cakes for special occasions like weddings and birthdays was commissioned to produce profitable armadillo-shaped cakes with gray icing for the filming. A film processing service reported record business both from movie people and local residents.

Restaurants, which adapted menus to suit the tastes of the movie crowd, were jammed not just with cast and crew, but with others who went out to eat often in hopes of getting a glimpse of the stars.

Ironically, the movie people embraced the slow and relaxed pace of the little community where they were filming, and the local people involved with the project reveled in the hectic, pressure-packed business of movie-making.

The rapport and mutual respect between the town and the film company were evident everywhere. Weeds were growing up around a filming site, and the movie people had a sign painted apologizing for the unsightly

grounds and explaining that the site was in that condition for filming purposes.

Local residents' nerves become frayed once in a while over traffic congestion, because there are only two downtown bridges across the lake that divides Natchitoches. But they were tolerant and understanding — usually even downright cheerful — when traffic became snarled near filming locations.

Natchitoches discovered that nothing is impossible in Hollywood. Special equipment and trucks piped extra air-conditioning into buildings that were overheated by movie lights. The crew created Christmas in August in downtown Natchitoches. They brought in trained “wild” birds and their handlers for a brief scene in the picture. They took all of the furnishings in a local beauty salon — hairbrushes, curlers and all — for props and replaced them with all new equipment and supplies. Silk magnolias flown in from Hollywood adorned trees that suddenly appeared to be in full bloom in the heat of summer.

The movie people were also impressed with Natchitoches residents. When 1,200 dyed eggs were needed for an Easter egg hunt, a local organization provided them. Local extras worked all night in bulky sweaters and coats during hot and humid August filming to provide realism for a Christmas scene. When the movie people needed a paint shop or greenhouses for plants or even football uniforms for a bit in the film, the university accommodated them.

A spokesman for the production company summed things up well when he told a newspaper about the role of the community in *Steel Magnolias*. “It is as much their film as ours,” he said.

Natchitoches became as much the movie people's home — if only temporarily — as it is for local residents. As Shirley MacLaine said, “There's a sociability here . . . an ambiance. Here you're more in touch with nature and

God and not ordered by technology.”

In Natchitoches, Dolly Parton was comfortable dropping in to surprise patrons of the neighborhood parlor that inspired the beauty shop in *Steel Magnolias*. Shirley MacLaine enjoyed the town so much that she brought her mother and daughter in for bit parts in the picture.

Olympia Dukakis was a little amazed at the town’s friendliness. Her cousin, Michael Dukakis, was the Democratic presidential nominee, and a dyed-in-the-wool Republican next door to her temporary home put a Dukakis sign in his yard. She asked about it, and he explained that he was just being neighborly.

Some former college football players invited a few movie people to their annual reunion and pig roast, and they swapped tales about big games and past pictures. When movies that cast and crew members had worked on previously came to the local theatre, they invited townspeople to join them for screenings and offered intriguing tidbits about the making of the movies.

The cast and crew learned that Natchitoches — progressive and sophisticated for a small town — is a microcosm of Louisiana. The customs, cultures and traditions of the 275-year-old community are rich and varied.

Some of the stars — including Dolly — and numerous crew members got a feel for the diverse cultural influences on Natchitoches when they attended a local folk festival that offered Cajun, blues, Zydeco and other forms of music. They sampled such culinary treats as fried catfish, meat pies, jambalaya and crawfish etouffe.

All six of the female stars went to a gospel singing program in a black church. Some of the movie people attended ceremonies inducting Terry Bradshaw and several other athletic stars into the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame on the Northwestern campus.

The movie stars themselves were inducted into the

new St. Denis Walk of Honor in Natchitoches, a downtown sidewalk Hall of Fame that honors those who have focused favorable attention on the community.

Not that the summertime marriage between the unlikely couple of Hollywood and Natchitoches was always rosy. It wasn’t. There were times when Natchitoches — no matter how hard it tried — was not enough for Hollywood. On other occasions, Hollywood — as much as it attempted to restrain itself — was too much for Natchitoches.

But those were fleeting moments that later provided good anecdotes and hearty laughter for California and Louisiana friends.

Much from the movie and those associated with it has been left behind in Natchitoches. There are bulging scrapbooks and photo albums in homes throughout the town, souvenirs collected at the huge garage sale the movie people conducted when filming ended and river-bank decorations that *Steel Magnolias* donated to the city for its annual Christmas Festival.

The cast and crew are reminded of their stay in Natchitoches by local cookbooks, crafts, paintings, photos taken with new friends and other memorabilia from a summer spent with people that they obviously liked and in a community that they clearly enjoyed.

In a letter to the governor of Louisiana following filming, a production company spokesman said of the people of Natchitoches, “They all seem to be of one heart.” They are the kind of people that inspired *Steel Magnolias*.

Just as the film *Steel Magnolias* captures so poignantly the relationships between six Southern women, the filming of the picture was an intermingling of people, places, feelings, emotions, spirits, make believe and reality from which meaningful and lasting relationships emerged.

# Natchitoches: The Real Chinquapin

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For a thousand or more years before Frenchman Louis Juchereau de St. Denis and his party of French militia and priests settled in Natchitoches (pronounced Nakatish) in 1714, the lush prairies and forests along the Red River were sacred lands of the peaceful Caddo Indians.

Because the Caddo Indians were described by French Europeans as “chinquapin eaters,” it is appropriate that writer Robert Harling, Jr., in seeking a simpler, less difficult name to pronounce, chose “Chinquapin” as a synonym for Natchitoches when he wrote *Steel Magnolias*. (A chinquapin is the nut of the chinquapin tree, which is similar to a chestnut.)

Located in the fertile Red River valley, approximately 60 miles east of the Texas border, Natchitoches pre-dates by two years the founding of New Orleans. As such, Natchitoches is the oldest permanent settlement in the vast Louisiana Purchase territory which was claimed for France by LaSalle.

After President Thomas Jefferson acquired the Louisiana Purchase area from France in 1803,



(Private Collection)

Once a row of warehouses which held the goods brought upriver by paddlewheel steamboat, the stores along Front Street (which is paved with bricks) have the look of New Orleans. As rich in history and culture as the larger town, Natchitoches was founded two years earlier, in 1714.



(Private Collection)

Europeans of English, Welch, Scottish, Irish and German descent reached Natchitoches overland on the old El Camino Real, while others came to the area via the Mississippi and Red Rivers on barges, flats, paddleboats, and steamboats. With the end of the Spanish threat and French political domination, many of these Americans of European descent settled the northern Louisiana area.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s thousands of slaves of African origin were brought into the

*Northwestern State University is an important part of the makeup of Natchitoches. It combines tradition with innovation, and is home to some 7,000 students.*

Natchitoches area to attend the fertile agricultural lands and the growing plantation society in the Red River valley.

During the early 1800s, Natchitoches was a small agricultural village, populated by Indians, French Catholic plantation owners, creole farmers and trappers, black slaves, and first- and second- genera-

tion European Protestants. By 1845, the Red River had completely changed its course, leaving the important inland port of Natchitoches isolated from river traffic.

The trickle of water that was left running through the muddy river bed was useless for riverboats, and the huge ditch with little water eventually was dammed at both ends. The resulting lake is 35 miles long and about 100 yards wide. Cane River Lake doesn't have any current, but everyone still calls it just Cane River, and it's the scenic focal point for the town. In fact, the main street is named Front Street, as in riverfront.

The areas around Natchitoches were inevitably impacted by the Civil War in the early 1860s. Fortunately, the City of Natchitoches was not a battleground during the Civil War and was spared the Union torch, though other communities in the area were burned. Through the years, important Revolutionary Period and ante-bellum period buildings in Natchitoches have been preserved, and Natchitoches remains one of the nation's great treasures of authentic colonial and pre-Civil War architecture.

In 1884, the Louisiana Normal College (today known as Northwestern State University) was founded in Natchitoches. Presently Northwestern State University is a leading university in the South for nursing, education and high-technology based telecommunications.



(Private Collection)

*The stately ante-bellum homes sprinkled around the area, known as "Cane River Country," attract visitors all year, but especially for the fall tour of homes.*





(Private Collection)

*The home of Henry Cook Taylor, where the wedding reception scene was filmed, was once disassembled, brick by brick, and rebuilt about 40 feet back from the street so that the previous owner could have a larger lawn.*

Building upon its rich legacies, Natchitoches today is a progressive small city (population 20,000) that continues to provide a nurturing environment

for outstanding writers, artists, actors, musicians, teachers, athletes, scholars, and professionals. With its own unique culture, a community symphony, a live theater, and an exciting fine arts center, Natchitoches is proud to have been the location for *Steel Magnolias*. The characters in this film reflect this rich and diverse culture of "Chinquapin."

# Celebrating the Human Spirit

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Six special women whose friendship and loyalty buoys them through the cycles of life, marriage, birth and death are at the heart of the film version of the bittersweet human comedy, *Steel Magnolias*. A Rastar Production for Tri-Star Pictures, *Steel Magnolias* stars Sally Field, Dolly Parton, Shirley MacLaine, Daryl Hannah, Olympia Dukakis and Julia Roberts as six remarkable friends. The men in their lives are portrayed by Tom Skerritt, Sam Shepard, Dylan McDermott and Kevin J. O'Conner.

Robert Harling adapted *Steel Magnolias* from his acclaimed stage comedy, which is currently running in New York, London and in national company touring the United States. At the center of his acute observations about the relationships between women is the very personal story of his mother and sister's courageous acts of caring.

Produced by Ray Stark, *Steel Magnolias* was directed by Herbert Ross. Victoria White was the executive producer, and Andrew Stone was the associate producer. George Delerue composed the music, and the cinematographer was John Alonzo.

As disparate as their personalities are, there is nothing that head-strong and beautiful Shelby (Julia

Roberts), her iron-willed mother M'Lynn (Sally Field), beauty parlor owner Truvy (Dolly Parton), acerbic curmudgeon Ouiser (Shirley MacLaine), the late mayor's elegant widow, Clairee (Olympia Dukakis), and the mysterious new girl in town Annelle (Daryl Hannah) can hide from one another.

At the annual Christmas "Festival of Lights," at the local Piggly Wiggly, during Sunday church services, and in Truvy's beauty shop, they face head on their greatest fears and highest hopes with their own wry wit and self-deprecating style.

Bridging boundaries of age and social status, the ladies find in this relationship a close camaraderie. Truvy is a dime-store philosopher and die-hard romantic providing the best listening ear in town; cranky oddball Ouiser, in a permanent bad mood, is just as important for the abuse she can take as for the amount she can dish out; the cultured Clairee can suddenly lighten up a somber mood with her unexpected mischievousness; and Annelle, the reluctant outsider who emerges as their surrogate daughter, keeps everyone guessing at her constant rebirth as she moves from scared innocent to town Jezebel to devout Bible-thumper.

Each of these women is, in her own way, a sur-



*“What I remember most about the town from my childhood is how everyone was able to look at their own foibles and strong points and laugh at them.” — Robert Harling (playwright)*

vivor, tough in the face of adversity, yet never losing her spark or grace or charm. Each succeeds in sustaining her friend and herself with a powerful mixture of strength and laughter.

The dynamic center of this close knit sorority is M'Lynn and Shelby. M'Lynn must suppress her motherly protective instincts at every turn as Shelby grows into the bright and independent girl M'Lynn brought her up to be. Shelby's decision to have a baby despite doctors' warnings challenges the very core of M'Lynn's maternalism. Yet, even she comes to realize that Shelby's thirst for the best in life — rooted in her certainty that a few minutes of wonderful is worth much more than a whole lifetime of nothing special — is an inspiration.

Shelby's conviction that nothing is impossible does more than just rally the love and support of these wonderful friends. It also prods them to take chances in their own routine lives, as each of these women uncovers something special that changes their lives and strengthens the very special friendships they share.

Much of Robert Harling's fictional story of un-sinkable friendship and family loyalty comes from real life, based on the sacrifices of his sister Susan

and mother Margaret in his home town of Natchitoches, Louisiana.

“This is basically the story of what my mother and sister went through and the community of women that surrounded them,” said Harling. At the time of his sister's death, Harling was a fledgling actor with no writing experience. Fueled by his grief, he incorporated fictional characters into his real-life memories, mixing the high spirit and humor of life in Natchitoches with the bittersweet story of his family's crisis, and produced *Steel Magnolias*, his very first play, in just 10 days.

Following the critical and popular success of *Steel Magnolias* off-Broadway, producer Ray Stark approached Harling about writing the film version of the play. “It was a lovely show,” Stark said of his immediate reaction to the play. “I thought it could be expanded into a movie, not just by going out the doors of the beauty shop, but also by exploring a lot of the people, the men, children and neighbors mentioned in the play but never seen.”

Once the script was finished, Harling suggested that his own home town be used as the filming location for the fictional town of Chinquapin. Stark agreed. “The myth of our film is embedded in Natchitoches. The people, the events and the aura that Robert Harling grew up with nurtured the play. We thought we could best serve his material by filming it where it actually existed.” Natchitoches, population 20,000, was founded by the French in

*Playwright Robert Harling was inspired to write Steel Magnolias, by the circumstances surrounding the death of his sister, Susan (right), who chose to become pregnant and have a child despite doctor's warnings that , because she was diabetic, it could be dangerous to her health.*

1714, the oldest settlement of the Louisiana Purchase. A close-knit community in the best American tradition of the small town, everyone in Natchitoches knows everyone else, and the town's history passes down from the mouth to ear through the generations, often spiced with humor.

Harling attributes the lively humor in the face of tragedy so prevalent in *Steel Magnolias* to his memories of constant laughter in Natchitoches. "What I remember most about the town from my childhood is how everyone was able to look at their own foibles and strong points and laugh at them. A real hallmark of the people in Natchitoches is that with their sense of humor, nothing can get them so down that they can't find something to help them get through it."

Over the years the town has produced an unusual number of larger-than-life legends, many of them strong, proud ladies who have sustained the community through hard times — steel magnolias, some call them — and the real-life inspiration for Shelby, Harling's sister Susan, has joined their ranks.

With history on their side, the filmmakers found



(Private Collection)

the people of Natchitoches more than accommodating during production. Homeowners even offered their residences for filming of living spaces, with most of the film's stars ultimately taking these homes for the summer.

"The location gave us a sense of community," said director Herbert Ross. "We were free to become part of the community, which was vital to capturing the quality of the play on film."

Townpeople went out of their way to provide a friendly welcome to the stars and crew. Olympia Dukakis remembered: "When I first got there I saw a sign on someone's lawn that said 'Michael Dukakis for President,' and Bob Harling said to me he was surprised because he knew those people to be Republicans. And he asked them why they put up the sign and they said because they thought it was the neighborly thing to do."

The town provided more than hospitality and colorful atmosphere, it also provided extras with a lot of personal motivation. Many people who had been part of Susan Harling's life were cast in their fictional roles. Nurses and doctors who had cared for Harling in the intensive care unit suddenly were replaying events from their own pasts before the camera. As Olympia Dukakis commented: "The town loved the film because it celebrates their lives, the ups and downs, the losses, the friends and families."

Many of the actors also got a chance to meet

their real-life counterparts. Dolly Parton was introduced to Liz Landrum, the salon owner who is the basis of Truvy; Sally Field and Julia Roberts spent hours talking with the Harlings to gain special insight into the mother-daughter relationship; and Shirley MacLaine covertly conversed with the several women who it was rumored were the inspiration for the composite grouch, Ouiser.

Talking with the local folk helped form accents, develop appropriate mannerisms and put a fix on the unique character each woman was about to create.

"I really enjoyed playing Clairee," said Olympia Dukakis, who had lunch with Natchitoches' genteel society ladies while researching her role. "I really liked her. I liked where she came from. I liked the fact that she started off in a rather protective place and then as the movie goes on, she emerges, she dares to live, to explore. I love that audiences are going to see a woman of that age doing that."

After meeting Margaret Harling, Sally Field felt she had a better understanding of the forces that drive M'Lynn. "It wasn't hard to realize what choices Mrs. Harling had to make. My son is almost that age. It was the process of mothering." Field was also helped along in her role by her newborn son, who kept her awake nights before shooting.

*The ensemble cast of Steel Magnolias: (clockwise from upper left) Dolly Parton, Sally Field, Dayl Hannah, Julia Roberts, Olympia Dukakis, and Shirley MacLaine.*



*“They were happy to see that I was a real Southern girl like them” — Dolly Parton*

“People were worried that I wouldn’t look old enough to be Shelby’s mother,” said Field. “But there was no problem because I was so tired. Every morning I was wrung out, and it was a perfect time to shoot the film.”

For Julia Roberts, who had to carry her character through scenes of pregnancy and illness while still maintaining her magnetic spirit, meeting the Harlings was a very emotional experience. She flipped through a photo album looking at pictures of Susan Harling and was inspired by stories of her courage and positive attitude. “Susan and Shelby both taught me a lot about courage, about loving life, about doing what you do and doing it well and about being true to yourself,” said Roberts.

When Dolly Parton dropped by the local beauty parlor, the inspiration for Truvy’s Beauty Spot, on a surprise visit, the local patrons were speechless, but soon the actress and her real-life counterpart were talking like old friends. “They were happy to see I was a real Southern girl like them,” she said.

Parton had a particular affinity for her character. “If I had not gone into the music business, I probably would have been a beautician. So Truvy was a bit like me — a big-hearted country girl trying to keep peace in the neighborhood, and stirring up just as

much trouble with everyone else with gossip and all.”

Shirley MacLaine had the opposite experience of Parton, playing a character totally unlike herself. “When I first read the character I thought, oh boy, this will give me a chance to be this way in real life, because I’m supposed to be such a positive thinker, always in an up mood, and now I get a chance to play this woman who’s absolutely treacherous in her cynicism. I loved that.”

Daryl Hannah, noted for her natural beauty and bright personality, also met the challenge of creating a character unlike herself. Hannah hides behind thick glasses and stringy brown hair for the first half of the film, barely recognizable.

As the six women of *Steel Magnolias* were brought to life before the cameras, the actresses found the on-screen camaraderie extending into their off-screen hours in Natchitoches.

“It was like having five sisters in my family,” said Shirley MacLaine. “Our parts were so well defined that there was a real emotional democracy at work. Each person came to care more about the others than they did about themselves.”

Small town life in Natchitoches provided an insulated, quiet, relaxing atmosphere for the production crew. “Putting us all together in this remote town unites us . . . partly because we couldn’t get out! We were together all the time,” said Sally Field.

While Natchitoches had an indelible effect on

*When I first read the character I thought, oh boy . . . I'm supposed to be such a positive thinker . . . now I get to play a women who's absolutely treacherous in her cynicism. I loved that." — Shirley MacLaine*

the Hollywood crew, Hollywood also made a lasting impression on Natchitoches as it became "Chinquapin" for a few weeks. In 1958 John Wayne came to Natchitoches for the shooting of *The Horse Soldiers* and for years after it was the big talk of the town. "People will come here for another 30 years to see where Dolly or Sally or Shirley lived," suggested former Natchitoches Sheriff Norm Fletcher, who won the role of Shelby's father-in-law in the film.

During production of *Steel Magnolias* area businesses also felt the impact of the production. For example, the Service League volunteered to boil and dye 9,000 eggs for use in the Easter sequences; the local florist had to round up 500 silk roses for Shelby's wedding; and a cake shop handled the most unusual request of all — the creation of the infamous "armadillo cake," with its armor-gray icing and shocking blood red filling.

For the six worldly women stars of *Steel Magnolias* the film's central attraction lay in the story's roots of neighborly kinship. "I think every one of us

has come from some sort of small town environment," observed Shirley MacLaine. "Even if you're from New York, you're from a neighborhood. That sense of community, and the interpersonal relationships are everything. I think the fascination never leaves."

Sally Field has starred in several films that take place in small American towns, and welcomed the chance to perform in *Steel Magnolias*. "The small town is quintessentially American," she said. "It's a look at life that really only takes place in this country: the way the community exists, the life-long relationships that these women have. The women of Chinquapin are together not only on a weekly basis, but for all the great occasions of life, the Christmases, the Easters, the funerals, the births, and they're always together preparing."

Robert Harling provided his own summary of the charm of fictional Chinquapin: "there's a celebration of the human spirit — that's what I feel *Steel Magnolias* is about — and that's real easy to capture in small town life."

*"The best thing I've read since "Terms of Endearment." — Shirley MacLaine (speaking of the script of "Steel Magnolias")*



(Private Collection)



## An Unlikely Location for a Movie?

How does a major motion picture such as *Steel Magnolias* come to be filmed in a small Southern town such as Natchitoches, Louisiana? It isn't unusual for a production company to shoot location scenes in small towns. What is unusual, however, is for the entire film, including the filming done in the studio, to be made "on location."

The selection of Natchitoches as the site for filming involves the cross-country odyssey of associate producer Andy Stone and a wonderful example of the way events sometimes come together as if by magic.

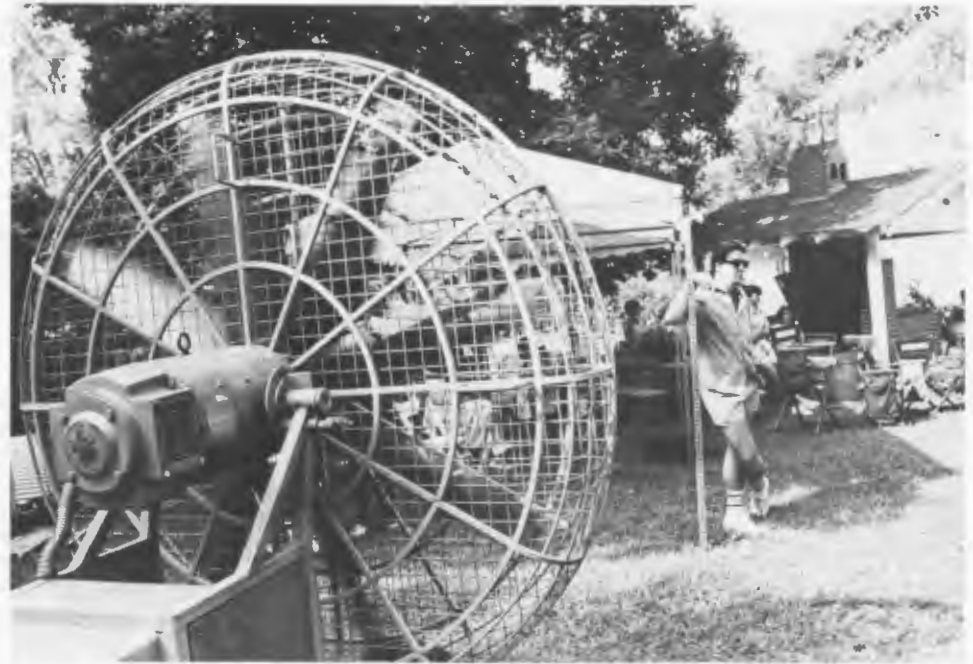
"The whole thing came together cataclysmically in a way that I've never seen with any other production," said Andy Stone, associate producer of *Steel Magnolias*. "In a period of about 48 hours, Tri-Star gave us the green light. Unprecedented. That kind of thing just doesn't happen.

"Ray Stark owned the property of *Steel Magnolias* and had commissioned Bobby Harling to write the screenplay.

"Ray was, I believe, at a Hollywood function and

ran into Dolly Parton and Sally Field. He told them about the property *Steel Magnolias*, and they said they were interested. The next day he sent a copy of the play to them. There was no screenplay written at the time; Bobby Harling was unable to work on it due to a writer's guild strike.

"They read the play, and by that afternoon the deal was in motion. I was called out of a meeting at



(Private Collection)

*Several times in the Hollywood discussions of filming in Louisiana in the summer, the primary concern voiced was the heat. Judicious use of large fans helped, and the climate didn't affect the shooting at all.*



*“We owed Bobby the courtesy of at least swinging through there and taking a look.”*  
— Andy Stone (Associate Producer)

about noon and was told to come back to the office immediately to meet with Ray and Herbert (Ross). I’ve never heard of any film being put together that fast.”

Speed was vital because of Dolly Parton’s commitments. She had a television series on ABC and she agreed to be in *Steel Magnolias* as long as she could be finished with filming in time to resume the series if it was picked up. As it turned out, the television show was canceled.

Suddenly there was this tremendous pressure to begin shooting quickly. As soon as Sally and Dolly agreed to do it, Herbert Ross agreed to direct it.

It took a tremendous leap of faith for everyone involved to agree to a film with no script. Each of them was persuaded largely by the powerful writing in the play, and the depth of the characters. Few films have truly virtuoso parts for women, and this one had several.

Andy Stone explains, “So all of a sudden you have Herbert, who had a deal with Tri-Star Pictures, and who is an eminently bankable director, and Ray Stark, who had a deal with Tri-Star Pictures, and who is an eminently bankable producer, Sally Field, a two-time Academy Award winner, and Dolly Par-

ton, whose popularity in the grass roots is beyond any kind of debate. Add to that the value of what was immediately recognized as an extremely talented script. Put all these elements together and Tri-Star was faced with either having to say yes or no in very short order.”

During this time Ray Stark started approaching other people, and it snowballed. Olympia Dukakis and Shirley MacLaine were interested. At this point he could go to others and say, “Herbert Ross, Dolly Parton, Sally Field, Olympia Dukakis and Shirley MacLaine have agreed in principal to work on the film, do you want in?” Everyone wants to be in a winner, and that line-up would get anyone’s attention.

Rather than taking weeks or months to pull it together, it was taking hours.

The next step was to find a location for shooting the film. The story was set in the South, so the first places to look were the southern capitals. Those major cities would have crews which could be picked up locally, eliminating housing costs. There would be film processing labs and sound stages as well as all the other facilities needed.

Truvy’s beauty parlor, where half the story takes place, would require a special set. Special requirements for lighting and camera positions made it impossible for it to be filmed in a real beauty shop. The set would require “wild walls,” that is, any portion of the walls could be taken down so the

scene could be lighted.

The most likely candidates were Dallas, Atlanta, and Wilmington, North Carolina, which all had fully equipped studios.

"I was put on a plane with the instructions not to come back until I had a real proposal of where would be the best, most practical place to shoot," Andy Stone said.

Stone spent a few days in Wilmington. It could have worked, he said, but there was nothing special there. There was no river in the middle of town, which wouldn't have ruled it out, but the site wasn't a good match with the story of *Steel Magnolias*.

At about this time Stone called to report his findings to Stark and Ross, and Herbert Ross said the playwright, Robert Harling, had called from New York and asked that they at least take a look at Natchitoches, Louisiana.

"Even though there were no crews there, and all that would have to be imported. Even though there was no equipment, and all that would have to be brought in. Even though there was no studio," Stone recalls with a chuckle, "not to mention labs, housing, commercial airline service, and all the rest, Herbert said that we owed Bobby the courtesy of at least swinging through there and taking a look."

New Orleans was on Stone's itinerary, and his next stop was to be Dallas, so he figured why not stop by on the way for a quick look, even if it was a waste of time.

After Wilmington, Stone went to Atlanta and found the facilities to be excellent, plus there was a small town nearby which could have worked as the mythical town named "Chinquapin." Next stop, New Orleans.



(Private Collection)

Associate Producer Andy Stone is seen here comforting one of the smaller extras who had a minor bicycle accident during the filming of one scene.



(Private Collection)

In the spring and summer of 1988, the Louisiana Film Commission was in a state of disarray, and was not equipped to show Stone any sites in North Louisiana. It had contacted Tom Whitehead to let him know Stone was mildly interested in taking a quick tour of Natchitoches. Whitehead teaches journalism, television and film production at Northwestern (Louisiana) State University in Natchitoches.

"If you really want to know why *Steel Magnolias* was filmed in Natchitoches, the reason is Tom Whitehead," said associate producer Andy Stone.

"When I arrived in New Orleans I had two messages waiting for me from Tommy, and when I called him it was obvious I was dealing with someone who was intelligent, who was extremely high on Natchitoches, and who was prepared to go to great lengths to meet me and to ensure that I would see Natchitoches as it should be seen."

When Whitehead picked up Stone in Baton Rouge to drive him the three and a half hours north to Natchitoches, Andy told him that Natchitoches wasn't the only town he wanted to see. Could they take a look at other small towns they went through on the way, he wanted to know. Whitehead said that was no problem, but as Stone would later recall,

*The last objection to filming in Natchitoches was met when Andy Stone saw the gymnasium in the P.E. Majors' Building at Northwestern State University. At left, workmen are busy building the set inside the gym.*

each time they passed through an interesting looking community, Tommy's foot would hit the accelerator, he would turn off onto side streets that weren't so picturesque, and in a few minutes that would-be filming site was 10 miles behind them, and Tommy was still singing the praises of Natchitoches.

As they drove north toward this "courtesy visit," Whitehead asked questions — lots of questions. What did the production company look for in a site? How does it operate? More questions. Probing for details.

Finally, the unofficial and unpaid representative of the film commission came to the point, "What would it take for you to film *Steel Magnolias* in Natchitoches?"

"Two things," said Stone. "The town must have the 'flavor' of the story, and it must have a film studio."

No problem on the first. After all, Chinquapin was Natchitoches. From the river in the middle of town, to the Christmas festival, Robert Harling wrote the play (and the subsequent screenplay) with his hometown in mind.

But a sound stage? Whitehead asked more questions and discovered that film companies sometimes built sound stages in large buildings — warehouses, abandoned industrial sites, and gymnasiums.

Upon arriving in Natchitoches they looked at a couple of houses that might work for location shoot-



(Private Collection)

*Tom Whitehead takes a break from his near-constant "facilitating" to pose with Dolly Parton.*

ing, and Whitehead called to make some arrangements. He took Stone to see the large indoor arena at Northwestern State University, but it was too large. Security might be a problem, and the acoustics were poor. Next, Tommy took him to see the Physical Education Major's building, which housed a gymnasium.

Andy Stone remembers it.

"It was night, the rain was pouring outside, and when he flipped on the lights and I looked around, I turned to Tommy and smiled. I knew we had our location."

The gymnasium wasn't going to be used during the summer when the filming was to be done, so a sound stage eventually was built there.

The tour of town the next day confirmed Stone's initial impression that this was the place, and he relayed that to Herbert Ross by telephone. Once Ross had seen Natchitoches, he agreed, but they still had to convince Ray Stark, and then Tri-Star Pictures would have to agree to film a major picture in a small southern town of 20,000 people.

On three separate occasions Natchitoches nearly was crossed off the list of possible sites, but not because of a lack of facilities. Stone had prepared statistics on each site listing average summer temperature, humidity and rainfall. Natchitoches ranked highest in all three categories. At three high-level meetings the discussions centered on the environmental conditions. Would the actors faint from the heat? Would make-up run? Could they possibly operate in such heat and humidity.

"I convinced them this wasn't the jungles of Vietnam we were talking about," said Stone, "and the decision was made."

Stone later called it a non-issue. The summer heat and humidity was never a factor in the production of *Steel Magnolias*.

Of course, not everything was perfect in Natchitoches. The azaleas were not in bloom during the time of the filming, so assistants tied thousands of silk blossoms to bushes for certain scenes.

For the most part, though, the town was perfect. After all, the part was written for it.



*While it may be true that just about any location would have worked for putting together Truvy's Beauty Spot, there aren't that many places with a river/lake in the middle of town. When the script called for action on the riverbank, to the riverbank they went. Although it has been closed for years, even the Piggly Wiggly mentioned in the script used to be right there on Front Street.*



(Private Collection)





(Private Collection)

# Cast of Characters

|                           |                   |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| M'Lynn Eatenton           | Sally Field       |
| Truvy Jones               | Dolly Parton      |
| Ouiser Boudreaux          | Shirley MacLaine  |
| Annelle DuPuy Desoto      | Daryl Hannah      |
| Clairee Belcher           | Olympia Dukakis   |
| Shelby Eatenton Latcherie | Julia Roberts     |
| Drum Eatenton             | Tom Skerritt      |
| Spud Jones                | Sam Shepard       |
| Jackson Latcherie         | Dylan McDermott   |
| Sammy DeSoto              | Kevin J. O'Connor |
| Owen Jenkins              | Bill McCutcheon   |
| Aunt Fern                 | Ann Wedgeworth    |
| Tommy Eatenton            | Knowl Johnson     |
| Jonathan Eatenton         | Jonathan Ward     |
| Belle Marmillion          | Bibi Besch        |
| Nancy Beth Marmillion     | Janine Turner     |
| Marshall Marmillion       | James Wicek       |
| Drew Marmillion           | Ronald Young      |
| Janice Van Meter          | Nancy Parsons     |
| Mayor Van Meter           | Robert Ginnaven   |
| Louie Jones               | Tom Hodges        |
| Bark Boone                | Rick Hurst        |
| Minister                  | Robert Harling    |



# Sally Field

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Sally Field portrays M'Lynn, the warm hearted but iron-willed mother of a young bride, in a role that returns her to the cinematic South that served her talents well in past screen triumphs in *Norma Rae* and *Places in the Heart*. For both films she won Best Actress Academy Awards.

The Pasadena, California native was born into an acting family. Her mother, Maggie Field Mahoney, was a Paramount contract player; her stepfather, Jock Mahoney, starred as television's *Yancy Derringer* and was one of the big screen's Tarzans.

Field was selected to play television's *Gidget* while attending acting classes at Columbia Studios and went on to become a television star with her title roles in *The Flying Nun* and *The Girl with Something Extra*.

After completing her film debut in *Stay Hungry* opposite Jeff Bridges and Arnold Schwarzenegger, she won an Emmy Award portraying a disturbed

*Sally Field, in her role as M'Lynn Eatenton.*





*Sally Field has had great success with her roles based in the South, and in Steel Magnolias she returns to that setting. Here, Field and Julia Roberts, who plays her daughter, Shelby, share a moment on the day of Shelby's wedding.*

woman tortured by a complex multiple personality disorder in the celebrated TV film, *Sybil*.

Concentrating on motion pictures, she went on to star opposite Burt Reynolds in *Smokey and the Bandit I and II*, *Hooper* and *The End*. She also appeared in *Heroes* before winning her first Oscar

for her portrayal of a Southern textile worker who becomes a committed union organizer in *Norma Rae* in 1979.

Field next starred in *Back Roads*, *Absence of Malice* and *Kiss Me Goodbye*. She won her second Oscar for *Places in the Heart* in 1984 for her moving portrait of a young woman trying to keep her family together and her farm going. Her most recent films include *Surrender*, *Murphy's Romance* and *Punchline*, the latter two for her own production company.

# Dolly Parton

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Dolly Parton's quick wit and Southern charm shine in her role as Truvy Jones, the exuberant owner of a neighborhood hair salon who provides a place for local women to share their gossip, triumphs and troubles.

Born in Locust Ridge, Tennessee, Dolly Rebecca Parton was the fourth of 12 children raised by a hard-working farm couple. Arriving in Nashville as a teen-age country singer, she soon rose to fame performing alongside popular singing star Porter Wagoner. She found a home in country music and had a significant following of fans by the time she left the Wagoner group to go solo in 1974.

Several of her albums became runaway hits, including the Grammy winning "Here You Come Again," "Great Balls of Fire" and "Heartbreaker," with platinum singles such as "9 to 5" and "Islands in the Stream" (a duet with Kenny Rogers) leading her to crossover success from country to popular record charts.

"Trio," an album of country songs she recorded with friends Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt, earned her a fourth Grammy Award in 1987.





The versatile performer turned to films in 1980 in a starring role with Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin in the box-office success *9 to 5*. Parton wrote the hit title tune that also earned an Oscar nomination for Best Song. She has also starred opposite Burt Reynolds in *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* and Sylvester Stallone in *Rhinestone*, writing and per-

forming the songs for both films.

A formidable businesswoman as well as a busy performer, she oversees a myriad of investments under her own company that includes the Dollywood theme park in Tennessee, a Hawaiian restaurant and several pieces of real estate.

# Shirley MacLaine

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As acerbic Ouiser Boudreaux, Shirley MacLaine reveals the goodness underneath the crusty complaints and sharp-tongued comments of the town curmudgeon. Known for her positivism, the renowned actress, singer, dancer and author of five best-seller books provides an ironic counterpoint to her character's cynicism.

Born Shirley MacLaine Beatty and raised in Arlington, Virginia, she became interested in dance at an early age and won her first stage role at age 20 as understudy to Carol Haney in *The Pajama Game* on Broadway. When the star sprained an ankle shortly after opening night, Shirley stepped in and was spotted by film producer Hal Wallis, who brought her to Hollywood.

After making her film debut in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Trouble with Harry* in 1955, she went on to become one of the screen's most sought after leading ladies with roles in such films as *Around the World in Eighty Days*, *Can-Can*, *The Children's Hour*, *Two for the Seesaw*, *Sweet Charity*, and *Being There*.

MacLaine received Best Actress Oscar nominations for *Some Came Running*, *The Apartment*, *Irma*



*La Douce*, and *The Turning Point*, culminating in her winning the Academy Award in 1983 for *Terms of Endearment*.

The multi-faceted performer also starred in several musical-variety television specials (for which she won five Emmy Awards); broke house records for her live, one-woman stage show *Shirley MacLaine on Broadway*; starred in the TV series *Shirley's World*; and led the first foreign women's delegation to China in 1973, a trip that resulted in MacLaine producing the Oscar-nominated documentary *The Other Half of the Sky: A China Memoir* in 1975.

In 1980 MacLaine published her first autobiographical book, *Don't Fall Off the Mountain*. Several best-selling books followed: *You Can't Get There From Here*, *Dancing in the Light*, *Out On a Limb*, and *It's All in the Playing*. In 1987 MacLaine also produced and starred in the ABC mini-series based on *Out On a Limb*.

A dedicated world traveler, political activist and student of metaphysics, she has turned her interests in New Age spirituality into a series of seminars called "Connecting the Higher Self" which she conducts around the world. She has also produced a self-help video cassette, *Shirley MacLaine's Inner Workout*.

Her most recent film work includes the title role of *Madame Sousatzka*, directed by John Schlesinger. MacLaine's forthcoming films include



*Playing the curmudgeon that everyone loves to hate, as the acerbic Ousier Boudreaux, Shirley MacLaine engages in a constant battle with Drum Eatenton (Tom Skerritt). Ousier claims Drum's antics are giving her dog a nervous breakdown.*

*Waiting For The Light*, a comedy-drama set during the Cuban Missile crisis, directed by Chris Monger and co-starring Teri Garr, and *Postcards From the Edge*, Mike Nichols' film of Carrie Fisher's novel.

# Daryl Hannah

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**F**orsaking glamour, Daryl Hannah undertakes the role of Annelle Dupuy, the mousy outcast who finds a new home and a new identity when she moves to Chinquapin.

Born and raised in Chicago, Hannah cultivated an early interest in dance and went on to study acting at the Goodman Theatre with renowned drama teacher Stella Adler. She did her first commercial at age 11 and made her film debut in Brian DePalma's *The Fury* before leaving high school.

Shortly after moving to Los Angeles and enrolling at the University of Southern California, she began to win more substantial acting assignments. After winning the lead in the ABC-TV series *Paper Dolls*, she was cast by director Ridley Scott as an acrobatic android in his science fiction film *Blade Runner*, with Harrison Ford, Rutger Hauer and Sean Young.

Roles in *Summer Lovers*, *Reckless* and *The Pope of Greenwich Village* led to her breakthrough role alongside Tom Hanks in Ron Howard's *Splash*, in which she played a real mermaid hopelessly lost amid the skyscrapers of Manhattan.







Soon establishing herself as one of the screen's busiest leading ladies, she followed with starring roles in *Clan of the Cave Bear*; *Legal Eagles*, opposite Robert Redford; *Roxanne*, opposite Steve Martin and *Wall Street*, opposite Michael Douglas and Charlie Sheen.

Before starting work on *Steel Magnolias* she completed her role as a winsome Irish ghost in *High Spirits*, starring with Peter O'Toole and Steve Guttenberg. She will next star in Tony Bill's *Crazy People*, with Dudley Moore and Paul Reiser.



# Olympia Dukakis

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Olympia Dukakis plays the elegant widow Clairee Belcher, Chinquapin's grande dame who balances her status as a town dignitary with her enduring friendship with local curmudgeon Ouiser Boudreaux.

Olympia Dukakis was born into the same strong-willed Greek immigrant family that spawned her politically-famous cousin, Michael Dukakis. After graduation from Boston University she returned to that school's post-graduate drama program.

A master teacher in drama at New York University, she continued to share her teaching duties with roles on and off Broadway. Her Broadway credits include Mike Nichols' *Social Security* as well as roles in *Abraham Cochran*, *The Aspern Papers*, *The Night of the Iguana*, and *Who's Who in Hell*. Among her many off-Broadway credits are Obie Award winning performances in Brecht's *Mann Ish Mann* and Christopher Durang's *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*.

Dukakis is also a veteran of more than 100 regional theatre productions and founding member of two regional theatres: The Charles Playhouse in Boston and The Whole Theater in Montclair, New





Jersey. The Whole Theater was nominated for a Tony Award and won the New Jersey Artistic Achievement Award. She is also a founding member of two summer theatres in Massachusetts, at Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard.

Dukakis' film career reached a zenith in 1987 when she won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role as a long-suffering

Italian mother in Norman Jewison's *Moonstruck*. Her other screen credits include *John Loves Mary*, *Death Wish*, *Made for Each Other*, *Rich Kids*, and *The Idolmaker*.

Dukakis also stars in the Steven Spielberg production *Dad*, starring Jack Lemmon and Ted Danson.

# Julia Roberts

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One of Hollywood's most promising actresses, Julia Roberts portrays Shelby, a spirited young woman whose vibrant spirit and commitment to life in the face of serious illness forms the central focus of *Steel Magnolias*. It is her second Rastar film.

Born in Smyrna, Georgia, Roberts grew up surrounded by the theatre. Her parents ran a series of acting schools and several of her siblings, including brother Eric Roberts, went on to act professionally on their own.

When she graduated high school, Roberts immediately drove to New York City and enrolled in acting classes there. Soon she won parts in commercials and a role on TV's *Crime Story* that led to film work.

Her first screen role was in Peter Masterson's *Blood Red*, followed by a co-starring role alongside Justine Bateman in *Satisfaction*. After completing a role in Rastar's HBO movie *Baja Oklahoma*, she won the lead in the critically acclaimed *Mystic Pizza*, which in turn led to her audition for *Steel Magnolias*. She will next star in Garry Marshall's comedy *Three Thousand*, with Richard Gere and Alec Baldwin.





*Director Herbert Ross (right) discusses a scene with Sally Field (center) and Julia Roberts (left)*

# Tom Skerritt

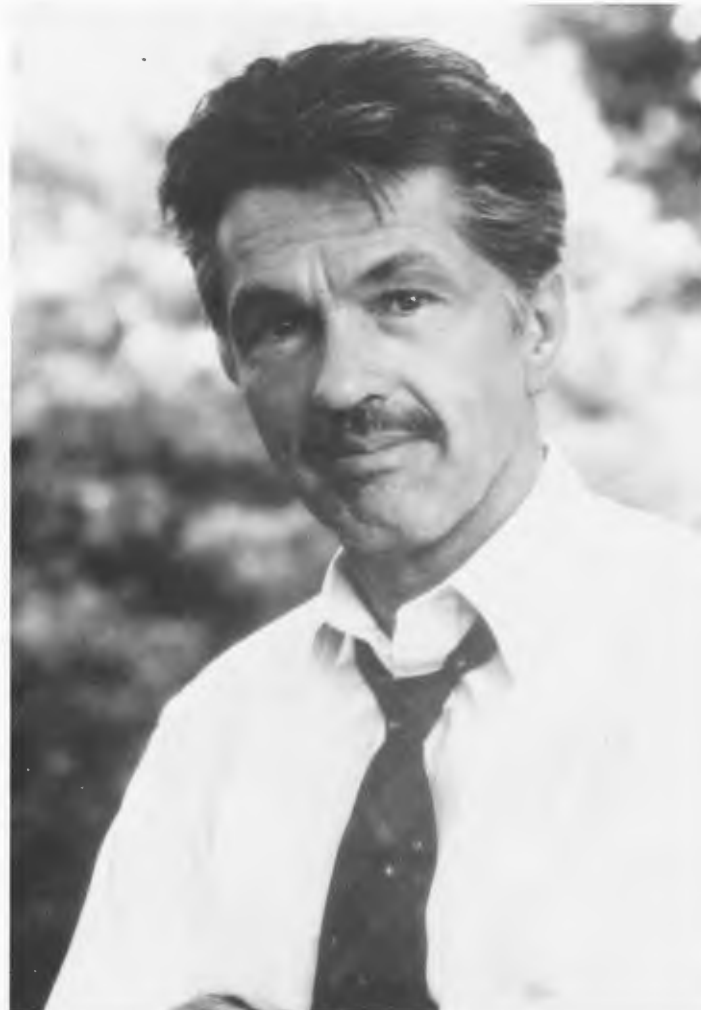
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As Drum Eatenton, Tom Skerritt plays a man whose zeal for playing practical jokes matches his zealous devotion to wife and family.

The Detroit native discovered drama at Wayne State University and later did two seasons of regional theater throughout the Midwest. He eventually moved to Los Angeles and enrolled at UCLA, where he was spotted in a student production of *The Rainmaker* and cast in a small role in the film *War Hunt*.

Skerritt's screen breakthrough came in 1970, when he co-starred with Donald Sutherland and Elliot Gould in Robert Altman's *M\*A\*S\*H*. He refused a role in the television version of that film and continued on screen in such films as *Fuzz*; *Thieves Like Us*; *Harold and Maude*; *Big Bad Mama*; *Run, Joe, Run* and *Up in Smoke*.

Memorable roles in films such as *The Turning Point*, *Alien*, *Silence of the North*, *Fighting Back*, *The Dead Zone*, *Opposing Force* and *Spacecamp* led to his most recent successes in *Top Gun*, *Maid to Order*, *Big Town* and *Poltergeist III*.



*At the wedding reception, Drum Eatenton, played by Tom Skerritt, dances with his newly married daughter, Shelby, played by Julia Roberts. Drum isn't seen in the stage play, only referred to. His character was added (along with Truvy's husband) to the film's screenplay.*

He has also found success on television in made-for-television films and as a recurring character on the top-rated comedy *Cheers*.

Skerritt is preparing to enter other areas of film making by developing screen projects to write and direct in the near future.



# Sam Shepard

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Sam Shepard's portrayal of Spud Jones, Truvy's husband, reveals a man who needs a steady job and a dose of positive thinking to rescue him from the doldrums of middle age.

A noted playwright, actor and screenwriter, the Illinois-born performer was brought up on a succession of military bases before his family settled on a farm near Duarte, California.

Possessing a strong affinity for drama, he drifted to New York City and wrote his first produced play, *Cowboys* in 1964. He went on to write more than 40 produced plays including *True West*, *Curse of the Starving Class*, *Fool For Love*, *A Lie of the Mind* and the Pulitzer prize-winning *Buried Child*.

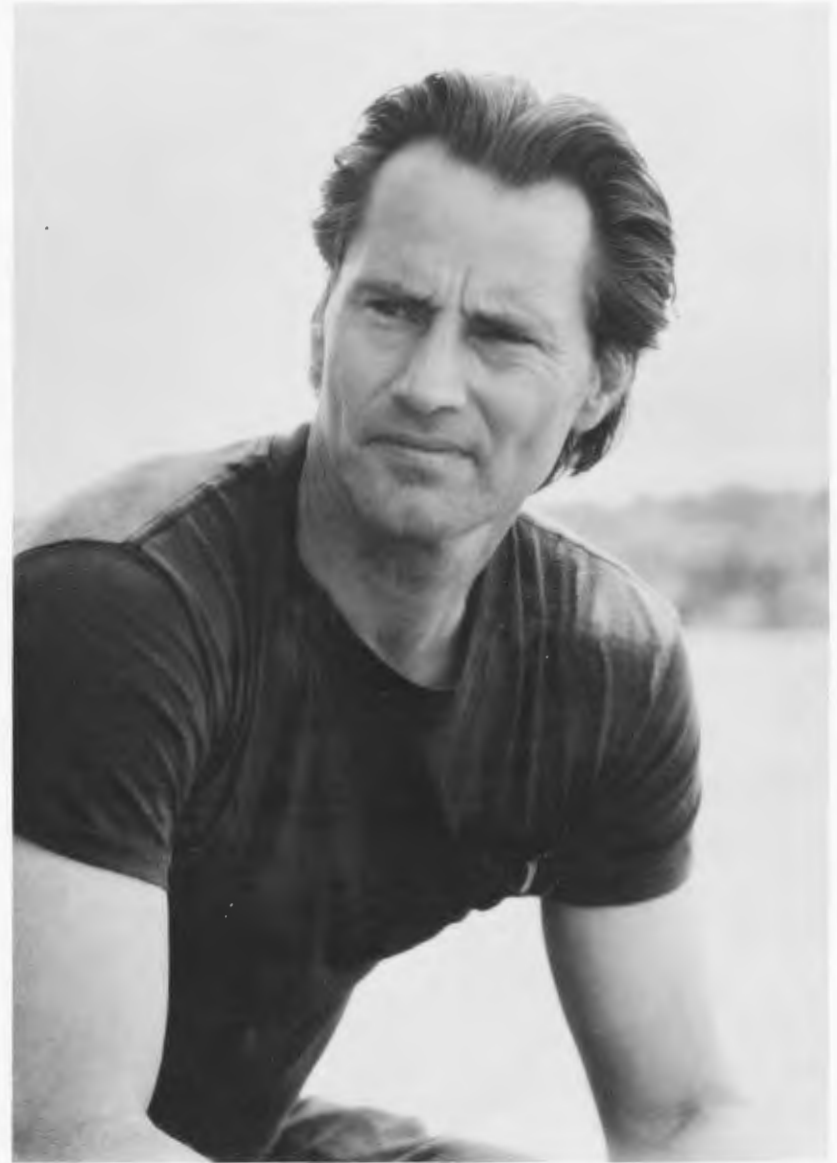
He also continued to act, though his stint as a drummer with The Holy Modal Rounders lead to a tour with Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue in 1975 and his subsequent writing of the *Rolling Thunder Logbook*.

Turning to the screen, he made his acting debut in 1978 in *Renaldo and Clara*, directed by



Bob Dylan, and went on to roles in films such as *Days of Heaven*, *Resurrection*, *Raggedy Man*, *Frances*, *The Right Stuff*, *Country*, the screen version of his play *Fool for Love*, *Crimes of the Heart* and *Baby Boom*. He most recently directed *Far North*, starring Jessica Lange, Tess Harper and Charles Durning.

As a screenwriter, Shepard wrote *Paris, Texas*, which won the Palme D'Or at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival.





# Ray Stark

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Ray Stark's history as a producer slices through a variety of themes and personalities, but the constant remains his sense of style and relationships. This is his eighth film with director Herbert Ross, and Stark has teamed for 10 films with Neil Simon, five films with Barbra Streisand, five with Jackie Gleason, four with John Huston and three with Sydney Pollack.

Stark's recent films include *Biloxi Blues*, starring Matthew Broderick; *The Secret of My Success*, starring Michael J. Fox and directed by Herbert Ross; *Peggy Sue Got Married*, starring Kathleen Turner, and *Nothing in Common*, starring Tom Hanks and Jackie Gleason.

Due for release in early 1990 from Rastar is *Revenge*, starring Kevin Costner.

Past successes from Stark range from *Funny Girl*, *Fat City*, *The Way We Were*, *The Goodbye Girl* and *The Electric Horseman* to *Smokey and the Bandit* and *Annie*.

He moved into motion picture production following an earlier career as a literary agent for such writers as Raymond Chandler, J.P. Marquand and Ben Hecht, and subsequently a talent agent, repre-





Producer Ray Stark, left, with director, Herbert Ross.

(Private Collection)

senting William Holden and Kirk Douglas, among others.

Stark was honored in 1980 with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Irving G. Thalberg Award for a lifetime of achievement in films.

In 1957 Stark formed Seven Arts Productions with Eliot Hyman, serving as executive vice president and head of production. In 1964, he produced the first of his four John Huston films, *The Night of the Iguana*. (Still to come with Huston were *Reflection in a Golden Eye*, *Fat City*, and *Annie*.) Later in 1964, he left Seven Arts to produce the Broadway

musical *Funny Girl*, based on the life of Fanny Brice (the mother of his wife Frances) and starring Barbra Streisand.

In 1966 Stark formed Rastar Productions to produce the film version of *Funny Girl*, directed by William Wyler, with Herbert Ross making his screen career debut directing the film's musical numbers. Stark's other films with Ross include *The Secret of My Success*, *Funny Lady*, *The Sunshine Boys*, *The Goodbye Girl*, *California Suite* and *The Owl and the Pussycat*.

# Herbert Ross

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**S***teel Magnolias* is the 21st feature film of director Herbert Ross, whose credits include such diverse motion pictures as *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*; *The Sunshine Boys*; *The Turning Point*; *The Goodbye Girl* and the recent *The Secret of My Success* teamed with producer Ray Stark. His films have received a total of 44 Oscar nominations.

Ross began his career as a choreographer for the American Ballet Theatre and subsequently the Broadway stage, where his credits as choreographer and musical director included *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*, *Tovarich* (for which Vivien Leigh won the Tony), *House of Flowers*, *On A Clear Day You Can See Forever* and *The Apple Tree* (for which Barbara Harris won the Tony), and the Tony nominated *Anyone Can Whistle*. Ross directed Barbra Streisand's show-stopping number as Miss Marmelstein in the Broadway musical *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*, which led to him directing her first screen test for the film *Funny Girl*. Subsequently, Ross also directed the musical numbers for the film.

Ross' first film as director, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, earned Peter O'Toole an Oscar nomination in 1969. He went on to direct Barbra Streisand in her first





non-musical comedy, *The Owl and the Pussycat*, followed by *Play It Again, Sam* with Woody Allen and *The Last of Sheila*, written by Stephen Sondheim and Anthony Perkins.

In 1974, Ross directed *Funny Lady* starring Barbra Streisand and James Caan. It was nominated for four Academy Awards. Then came Ross' first Neil Simon project, *The Sunshine Boys*, starring Walter Matthau and George Burns, honored with Academy Award nominations for

both actors. George Burns won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor. In 1976, Ross and Nora Kaye produced and directed *The Seven-Percent Solution* starring Nicol Williamson. Two Ross-directed films of 1977 — *The Turning Point* with Anne Bancroft, Shirley MacLaine and Mikhail Baryshnikov; and Neil Simon's *The Goodbye Girl* with Richard Dreyfuss and Marsha Mason — were honored with a total of 15 Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture for each. Ross was nominated as Best Director for *The Turning Point* and Richard Dreyfuss won the Best Actor Oscar for *The Goodbye Girl*.

Also in 1977, Ross directed Neil Simon's *Chapter Two* on Broadway (four Tony Awards) and directed the film version of *California Suite* (Maggie Smith winning Best Supporting Actress Oscar).

In 1979 Ross and Kaye brought *Nijinsky* to the screen with Alan Bates, with Ross returning to Broadway for *I Ought To Be In Pictures*, which won Dinah Manoff the Tony Award.

Ross and Kaye went on to the musical drama *Pennies From Heaven*, starring Steve Martin and Bernadette Peters followed by Ross directing and producing with Neil Simon the film version of *I Ought To Be In Pictures* and *Max Dugan Returns*. Ross directed the extremely successful *Footloose* with Kevin Bacon and *Protocol* starring Goldie Hawn, and one of the largest box-office films of 1987, *The Secret of My Success*.

# Robert Harling

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Robert Harling is making his screenwriting debut with the film version of his first play, *Steel Magnolias*, loosely based on events from his life and his neighbors in the lovely Louisiana town of Natchitoches.

Born in Dothan, Alabama, Harling settled in Natchitoches, Louisiana in his early teens when his father took a job as a paper company executive.

After graduating from Northwestern State University with a history degree, he attended Tulane University's law school, earning money by singing with a big band called "Jubilation" and acting in local theatre.

After receiving his law degree he headed for New York City to find work as an actor with "two sweaters in my suitcase during the biggest snowstorm of the year." In New York, after taking on a few regional theatre jobs, he found success as a commercial voice-over actor on both television and radio selling everything from chili to chicken.

When Harling's sister Susan died of complications of diabetes in October of 1985, her life inspired



*As a senior at Natchitoches High School, Robert Harling was co-editor of the school yearbook — The Chinquapin.*

*Robert Harling chats with Shirley MacLaine during a break on the set of Steel Magnolias.*

him to turn his grieving into a creative storm as the story of *Steel Magnolias*, first as a play that found instant success off-Broadway. Harling was then signed to write the screenplay of the film version for producer Ray Stark.

Harling is currently at work on several new film projects and hopes to write and act in these works.





*Lights, Camera, Action! With director Herbert Ross behind the camera to see how it looks, the actors walk through their places while the sound man holds a boom mike above them. As the actors move, the camera is pulled along tracks with them. Robert Harling suggested Natchitoches for a filming location, and it proved to be ideal. At right, Tom Skerritt takes on the blackbirds, per the script.*



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)

# Memories

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**M**emories. What a summer it was! For a small town to be invaded by Hollywood, to have Oscar-winning actors in our midst, well, it was all just too grand. And when it was over, we had, as our favorite son Bobby Harling said, the best part. We had the memories.

What follows is just that, our memories in the form of pictures taken on the set, around town, and of just about anything connected with *Steel Magnolias*.

The people of Natchitoches have always known this is a very special place . . . a place steeped in tradition, rich in culture. It is, in fact, our own Brigadoon.

Perhaps the biggest thrill for us, then, was having that feeling validated by the technicians, the staff, the service people, the crew and the cast. We came to love many of them, and through the summer, they came to appreciate a place "where everyone knows each other," and to consider that maybe, someday, they might leave the rat race for a place like Natchitoches.

These are our memories. This is our *Steel Magnolias* Scrapbook.



(Private Collection)





(Private Collection)

*Not only did we work together, but we played together, too. Shirley MacLaine clowned for the crowd (opposite page) , and Dolly Parton got to spend some time with Margaret Harling (left). But the work was sometimes hard. Below, Daryl Hannah rests during a break.*



(Private Collection)

*Julia and Sally played with the babies on the swing (below), while Tom Skerrit decided two hats were better than one. As Annelle, Daryl Hannah had to put up Christmas lights and ornaments.*



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)





(Private Collection)



*When they were not working, the stars of Steel Magnolias were able to relax or play as they wanted to. In addition to riding horses and jumping on a trampoline, Daryl took some time to ride a bicycle. Back at work (right) Hannah and director Herbert Ross exchange ideas.*





(Private Collection)





*Known for her natural beauty, Daryl Hannah displayed courage in taking the role of Annelie in *Steel Magnolias*. Although the character blossoms late in the film, Hannah hides her beauty behind stringy hair and ugly eyeglasses for the first half. In the photo on the opposite page, a stand-in for Hannah walks down oak-lined Williams Avenue so that technicians can set up the camera and lights in preparation for the upcoming scene.*



(Private Collection)

To commemorate the stars of "Steel Magnolias" and others who have helped bring national recognition to the town, the City Bank put in a "Walk of Honor" on the sidewalk in front of its downtown main branch. In addition to the six female stars of "Steel Magnolias", John Wayne and John Huston, who filmed "The Horse Soldiers" in Natchitoches in the 1950s, had their names enshrined in marble. Producer Ray Stark, director Herbert Ross, and hometown favorite, playwright Robert Harling were included. (A new square was put in for Harling after the unveiling — one which spelled "playwright" correctly.) Others honored with squares were folk artist Clementine Hunter and conservationist/writer Grits Gresham. In 1989, professional basketball player, Joe Dumars, (a Natchitoches native) was added. At left, Dolly Parton uncovers her plaque while former Sheriff Norm Fletcher looks on.



(Private Collection)





(Private Collection)

*The campus of Northwestern State University, situated on rolling hills between Chaplin's Lake (foreground) and Sibley Lake (top of photo).*



*During the wedding reception, actor Tom Hodges danced with Nancy Parsons . . .*



*And Dylan McDermott, playing Jackson Latcherie, dips Sally Field, who plays his new mother-in-law, M'Lynn.*



*While the photographer was getting a group shot of the stars, Herbert Ross got into the act, and who can blame him? Below, Ross (left), producer Ray Stark (center) and associate producer, Andy Stone (in sun glasses) discuss logistics.*



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)



*Natchitoches attorney Coley Gahagan and his wife, Sharon, were used as extras in a scene filmed in their home. Here they are seen with Shirley MacLaine.*



(Private Collection)

Locals who portrayed the fictitious Lacherie family included (l. to r.), front row, Alec Rice (Shreveport), Ryan Oswald (Shreveport), Jhela Aligholzadeh (Natchitoches), Chrissy Romine (Natchitoches) Cody Nelson (Marthaville), and Michael Blake Kramer (Winnsboro). Back row: Jason Hudson (Natchitoches), Thomas Leavell (Shreveport), Norm Fletcher (Natchitoches) Lorenn Tate (Natchitoches), Thomas Tompkins (Shreveport), and Toni Gwinn (Natchitoches).





(Private Collection)

*Cane River Lake “runs” through the middle of Natchitoches. It is the site of the annual Christmas Festival held the first Saturday of December, as well as the scenic focal point of the historic town.*

*Not only did one of the gyms at Northwestern State University serve as the studio for the indoor scenes of "Steel Magnolias," but many of the offices and services of the university were made available to the cast and crew during the summer of 1988.*



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)





(Private Collection)

*The local townspeople got a chance to see some of the "behind the scenes" details of movie making, from the tracks laid to provide a smooth surface for camera movements, to a quick peek through the viewfinder when no one was looking.*



(Private Collection)







*In the scene above, Olympia Dukakis walks down the sidewalk on scenic Front Street. Except for the addition of a couple of signs specific to the script, the film company was able to use downtown Natchitoches as they found it. The Easter egg hunt was shot on the amphitheater-like riverbank downtown. The Christmas Festival was recreated on the riverbank, just as it is each December, and the brick paving and wrought iron of Front Street added to the flavor.*



*Movie making is serious business where millions of dollars are invested, especially with a blockbuster cast the likes of that in "Steel Magnolias," but no one can be serious all the time. At left, director Herbert Ross threatens to cool off a couple of mega-stars with a dime-store water gun. Daryl Hannah is holding dyed Easter eggs which will be used during the egg hunt scene. Below, playwright Robert Harling, appearing in the film as the minister, jokes with Shirley MacLaine while Olympia Dukakis looks on. At right, Sally Field reacts to someone's antics on the set.*



(Private Collection)









*(opposite page) The fur is about to fly as Ouiser Boudreaux's dog gets an eyeful of his mortal enemy, Drum Eatenton. While the minister (Robert Harling) and Owen Jenkins (Bill McCutcheon) look on in horror, Ouiser (Shirley MacLaine) attempts, albeit half-heartedly, to keep her dog under control. (left) At the Chinquapin Christmas Festival everyone has a good time, including Jackson Latcherie (Dylan McDermott, Shelby Eatenton (Julia Roberts) and her father, Drum (Tom Skerritt).*



*All work and no play makes Jack a sleepy boy. Curt Harrington (right) and the unidentified fellow below danced their hearts out for the scenes of the wedding reception. Again and again, different shots had to be repeated. During a break in the hot (middle of the summer) action, these two youngsters couldn't hold up any longer, and they nodded off to sleep in (and on) chairs. When the call came for everyone to be in their places, though, they were ready. On the opposite page, this is how Hollywood makes rain. Special sprinkler heads atop tall poles bring down Southern showers on cue.*



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)









*"I'm not crazy. I've just been  
in a bad mood for 40 years."  
— character Ouiser  
Boudreaux*

*Ouiser may not be crazy, but she's definitely cantankerous. It was rumored that Shirley MacLaine visited with several local women who were thought to be the basis for the composite character, Ouiser.*

## “My Summer Vacation”

---

Dear Editor,  
As the lilting memories of last summer begin to fade just a bit, I thought you might be entertained by the final musing of my seven-year-old son, Tyler, as presented in his “What I did During Vacation” report to his third grade classmates at St. Mel School in Woodland Hills, Calif.

Tyler Stone  
Summer Vacation

For the summer I went to a small town called Nachtish. It was very hot and very peaceful. Everyone knew each other.

For those of us “movie people” who elected to uproot our budding surfer dude offspring and bring them to Natchitoches “for the duration,” it proved to be a far more enriching experience than any of us had imagined. Tyler has struck up a long-distance correspondence with a few of his friends, and I would not be surprised if a cross-country plane trip or two (in both directions) were to take place over the next few years.

Inevitably, Tyler and our other boys have already begun their now-familiar chorus: “Where are we going next summer, Daddy?” Little do they know

or care what mixed memories of my own they have triggered. Truth is, my father was also a movie producer; and yes, I was also hauled around from location to location.

There was a time when I vowed to break the continuance of this Barnum and Bailey cycle. After all, a strong voice inside of me perhaps still hopes that my children will choose to pursue more stable, “sensible” careers. On the other hand . . . well, I guess they will have to sort it out for themselves. Of one thing I am certain: this Summer of ’88 provided them with the best experience that the “gypsy life” can afford. If any one of them becomes “hooked,” I will lay the blame solidly on the banks of Cane River. Why? Well, I omitted the second refrain of their chorus: “Will it be like Natchitoches, or will it be yucky?”

Just in case you may be thinking that this is a letter only about kids, I have a further confession to make. Now that *Steel Magnolias* has settled down into the comfortable groove of “post-production,” I have traded in my office cubicle at the NSU Physical Education Majors’ Building for somewhat glitzier digs in a high-rise, high-rent skyscraper in Century City (a rabbit warren of show-biz lawyers, agents and independent film companies).

Associate producer, Andy Stone (right) and director Herbert Ross confer during "the summer of '88."



(Private Collection)

During lunch hour, I "clear my head" by strolling past Saks Fifth Ave., a theatre where *Les Miserables* is packing 'em in and an array of restaurants representing a wider spectrum of ethnicity than I care to know exists. When lunch hour is over, I dodge my way back to the relative seclusion of my own pigeon-hole. There, on the wall, still hang several posters given to me by the Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce. Many months ago, when they were originally hung, they seemed exotic, somehow unreal. Today, after lunch, they invite my gaze, a few moments of thought . . . and just the trace of a smile.

Sincerely,  
Andrew Stone,  
Associate Producer, *Steel Magnolias*  
(From The Natchitoches Times)







*Lonnie Casey, manager of Brookshire's grocery in Natchitoches, said bumping into stars in the store became somewhat routine. But what was found on the shelves because of them was far from routine. Apparently, he said, many of the movie folks were vegetarians. He remembers stocking some special herbs just because of the movie demand. What were they? "I can't pronounce any of them," he said.*

*At left, Herbert Ross shows Shirley MacLaine and Olympia Dukakis how he wants part of the funeral scene played. In Steel Magnolias, comedy finds its way even into the graveyard. At right, Truzy's son (Tom Hodges) shows off his new girlfriend (Aja Sansome), complete with tatoos.*



*Even though the filming was sometimes hectic, there still was time for play. Tom Skerritt was seen at the controls of a bass boat occasionally (below). He also took time out to chat with former sheriff, Norm Fletcher, who landed a part as Jackson Latcherie's father.*



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)

*The children involved with the film came away with a summer of unique experiences. Cinematographer John Alonzo showed Jensen Gahagan how to take a light reading during the filming of the Christmas party. Sally Field and Curt Harrington got a chance to talk about how tiring it was to dance in the wedding reception*



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)



*"I'm basically just starting out, and it doesn't get any better than this." — Julia Roberts*







(Private Collection)

Women from the local area were selected to be stand-ins for the six female stars. They took the place of the actors while scenes were being set up and lighting was being adjusted. The women were selected because they had physical features similar to those of the stars. Clockwise, from bottom, Marjorie Billingsley (for Olympia Dukakis), Michelle Cox (Daryl Hannah), Ellen Donaldson (Sally Field), Betsy Watson (Julia Roberts), Rita Hart (Dolly Parton), Mary Nell Wilkerson (Shirley MacLaine). Below, Daryl Hannah.



(Private Collection)





(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)





*When it came to filming the Christmas Festival, Natchitoches simply pulled out in August the lights and the decorations it uses each December for its real festival. The first Saturday of December, people come from all over Louisiana and surrounding states to see the parade, entertainment, huge fireworks show, and the climax, the town's impressive Christmas lights display which covers the entire downtown section, including the bridge and the riverbank. The display is illuminated through New Year's Day, giving Natchitoches the title "City of Lights."*



## Help! Extras Needed

Individuals throughout North-Central Louisiana who are interested in serving as volunteer extras for the movie *Steel Magnolias* are invited to a special casting call scheduled for 6 p.m. Friday, Sept. 9, in the Fine Arts Auditorium at Northwestern State University.

Bill Dance, extras casting director for the picture said, "Several hundred people over the age of 18 are needed for some Christmas Festival scenes that will be filmed on the nights of Sept. 13, 14, and 15."

Dance said filming each day will be from 6 p.m. until 5 a.m. "Those who volunteer must be available all three nights," he said, "because of the necessity for continuity among the extras in the scenes."

The casting director stated that individuals "of various age levels and ethnic groups are needed. The diversity of the

Natchitoches Christmas Festival crowd each year should be reflected in the filming."

Dance pointed out that there is a particular need for more men. "The all-night filming has made it difficult for many working men who want to serve as extras to make a three-night commitment to the filming, so men with flexible work schedules are needed as volunteers."

Serving as volunteer extras "will be an enjoyable experience for several reasons," Dance said. "First, there will be a little preview of the Christmas Festival with the lights and riverbank booths. Volunteers will get a first-hand look at movie-making, and they will see the stars of the film in action."

Sally Field, Shirley MacLaine, Olympia Dukakis, Dolly Parton, Julia Roberts and Daryl Hannah are all scheduled to appear in the Christmas Festival scenes, Dance said.

*(The Natchitoches Times)*



(Private Collection)

*And show up they did! Hundreds of people answered the call for extras — many were selected for the numerous scenes. Tom Whitehead is seen above directing traffic among the hopeful.*

*"I was just looking for a job since ABC fired me." — Dolly Parton (joking)*



(Private Collection)

*When dealing with superstars, little things mean a lot. Identical motorhomes were provided for each of them to use for costume changing or just relaxing. Dolly got into the spirit by singing at the film company's "wrap" party.*



(Private Collection)





(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)

The “invasion” of Natchitoches involved holding press conferences, building sets, and setting up tons of lighting equipment.





(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)

*"We put together on paper what we considered was our dream cast. All of them wanted to be involved." — Herbert Ross*



(Private Collection)

*A Chicago native, Daryl Hannah has played roles in major hits alongside actors Tom Hanks, Harrison Ford, Robert Redford, Steve Martin, Michael Douglas and Charlie Sheen, always as a beautiful woman (and in "Splash," a mermaid). In the character of Annelle, she begins Steel Magnolias as a homely and shy country girl (opposite page), and evolves into a Jezebel, and then a Bible thumper. The transformation in her physical appearance is startling.*











## The Stars Are Here

The stars are here. Sally Field, Shirley MacLaine, Dolly Parton, Olympia Dukakis, Daryl Hannah and Julia Roberts arrived in Natchitoches this week to begin rehearsals for *Steel Magnolias* and they have the community pulsating with excitement.

In a news conference Tuesday, the actresses were warm, gracious and relaxed. They seemed impressed with the hospitality and friendliness of local people and indicated that they will be spending time during the next two months in area restaurants, businesses and recreational facilities.

It is likely that most local residents will see the stars numerous times before filming is completed in mid-September, and these special guests will appreciate and enjoy their stay here more if their privacy is respected. Certainly they enjoy the limelight and the attention of fans, but they also like to dine, shop and participate in recreational activities without interruption.

Natchitoches is nationally-known for its warm and friendly atmosphere, and every effort should be made to demonstrate that kindness and courtesy to the stars who will be our guests and neighbors this summer.

*(Editorial from The Natchitoches Times)*







*In reading about the true-life events which served as the inspiration for writing "Steel Magnolias" one might get the idea that it is a somber story. Not so. It is a comedy-drama, with the emphasis on comedy. In the locker room of a high school football team, Ouiser Boudreaux takes more than a little time to touch up her makeup (opposite page). Above, the friends of the groom decorated his car, using condoms instead of balloons, thoroughly embarrassing all the women present, not to mention the minister.*

*What's a working mother to do? How about putting the wading pool in the shade at the work site? Between scenes, Sally Field was able to take time out to play with her youngster.*



(Private Collection)

(Private Collection)





*Playwright Robert Harling not only wrote the screenplay for the film, but he appears as the minister who conducts Shelby's wedding ceremony. In addition to his law degree, Harling has training and experience as an actor, having worked in New York City for years. "Steel Magnolias" is his first play (and screenplay), but he already has written another film, which is to be produced, and yet a third was in the works even before "Steel Magnolias" had been released.*



*"I've always wanted to work with him (Herbert Ross)." — Sally Field*







(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)

*Oh! I bet that hurts. When Tom Skerritt picked up a big splinter from a boat dock while fishing, the nurse on the set decided a tetanus shot was called for. Young Jensen Gahagan watched, but she didn't like it. The scene on the opposite page will not be seen by audiences. It was edited out during the post-production phase.*



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)



Lilia Spillman, *Just Friends*' cook who rubbed elbows with many of the movie people who liked to eat there, said she also tried to accommodate the veggie requirements.

"Shirley MacLaine's favorites were okra and tomatoes and rice pilaf," she said. The others generally ate whatever was on the menu for the day. "Tom Skerritt would eat turkey, but no beef or pork. Olympia Dukakis is an extreme vegetarian — she didn't even like to eat things seasoned with things that were meat products. Julia Roberts' favorite is chicken salad with no celery," she said. Skerritt apparently won the most hearts, though.

"Tom Skerritt was the easiest person to please I ever met. He wouldn't come in and order, he would come in and say, 'What am I having for lunch today?'"

*(The Shreveport Times)*





*The bride's colors were "blush and bashful," or pink and pink, depending upon whom you asked.*





*"It was the courage in the play I find very moving. It's that something extra that is a part of all of our lives. We all have times when we have to reach down inside of ourselves for that extra strength." — Olympia Dukakis*







*Sally Field and local children at Easter egg hunt scene.*



*Robert Harling, Olympia Dukakis and Herbert Ross, obviously enjoying their work.*

*Daryl Hannah as she looks at the beginning of "Steel Magnolias," (below) and the end of the story (right). Kevin J. O'Connor plays Sammy DeSoto, Annelle's husband. He moonlights as the Easter bunny.*



(Private Collection)







*"We need a couple of day's breather, but I think everyone would be ready for them to come back next week." — Betty Jones, executive vice president of the Chamber of Commerce.*



(Private Collection)





*“The cast of ‘Steel Magnolias’ features the greatest collection of talent since Mickey Rooney leaned over to Judy Garland and said ‘Let’s put on a show.’” — Rick Bentley (The Alexandria Town Talk)*



(Private Collection)

*(Opposite page) Cinematographer John Alonzo, who received an Academy Award nomination for “Chinatown,” watches from behind his camera.*

*"There's a sociability here . . . an ambiance. I've been out of touch with that. Other places did not make one feel at home. I find the South a mystical place, not necessarily reminiscent of what I write about.*

*"Natchitoches is a rich, pretty, little place. It's unbelievably friendly." — Shirley MacLaine*



(Private Collection)



(Private Collection)





*"I like the idea of playing an irascible curmudgeon. Ouiser entertains the town with her cynicism. It's my favorite part in the play. There is a depth to her you might not recognize."*  
— Shirley MacLaine





*"It's a part I can relate to. If I had not been in the entertainment business, I probably would have been a beautician. I like fooling with hair and makeup. It's a natural part for me." — Dolly Parton*



(Private Collection)



*At left, Julia Roberts, recently voted one of the most beautiful women in America, shows how she would look with short hair. In a fit of independence, Shelby has Truvy cut her beautiful hair.*

*When the character Clairee Belcher tells Shelby's son (played by Daniel Camp) a fairy tale, it sets up a wild surprise for her old friend and nemesis, Ouiser Boudreaux.*









*"I already know that everyone here knows what everyone else is doing. I am going to sit quietly and watch the ducks and keep my mouth shut." — Shirley MacLaine*



(Private Collection)





*Left, Clairee Belcher, the wife of the former mayor, and the wife of the current mayor ("we hate her"), played by Nancy Parsons, cut the ribbon at a dedication ceremony. Above, Annelle looks forlorn after leaving Zwolle for the big town of Chinquapin.*







*Blockbuster recording star Dolly Parton and Academy Award winner Olympia Dukakis as Truvy the beautician and Clairee, the elegant, wealthy former first lady of Chinquapin.*



# 'Magnolias' Wraps; Stars Leaving

by Lane Crockett  
The (Shreveport) Times

The party's almost over in Natchitoches. Maybe all the balloons haven't been burst, but filming has ended on the set of *Steel Magnolias* and the film company is quickly dispersing.



(Private Collection)

*The "director's" chairs may be empty, but for the people of Natchitoches, however, there's no danger of forgetting the visitors of the summer of 1988.*

Dolly Parton, Olympia Dukakis, Daryl Hannah and Tom Skerritt left Friday. Sally Field, Julia Roberts and director Herbert Ross leave today.

Shirley MacLaine was the first star to leave, says David Linck, unit publicist. A Learjet swooped into the Natchitoches airport Thursday and whisked her off to Canada. She is to make an appearance this weekend at the Toronto Film Festival in connection with her new movie *Madame Sousatzka*.

The pilots came to the film set and waited for MacLaine to wrap, Linck says. When she finished the scene, she was applauded. She immediately embraced Field and Ross, picked up her things and was gone.

Actual filming ended Friday with a scene between Field and Julia Roberts. Linck says it was a kidney transplant scene shot on the soundstage.

Hannah returned to Los Angeles. Skerritt left for Seattle. Dukakis left for New Jersey; she'll be stumping for cousin Michael in New Jersey, New York and Washington, D.C.

Parton, who went back to Nashville, will be writing a theme song for *Steel Magnolias*. [Later, it was decided Parton would not write the theme song. Ed.] Inspired by a funeral scene, she has written another song about the movie. Parton also will be recording an album of traditional country music and preparing





(Private Collection)

a tour date on the road with Kenny Rogers. She is planning to get a band together and then take a bus tour of smaller cities not usually on performers' routes.

Field goes to New York City, where she is starting a publicity tour for her new *Punchline* film co-starring Tom Hanks.

Roberts returns to Los Angeles and will be doing publicity in connection with her new film, *Mystic*

*What more can one say? It was magic. The people who live in Natchitoches have always known it is a special place. Through "Steel Magnolias," others will surely discover it. They, too, will be welcome.*

*Pizza*, which opens in late October.

Ross returns to New York City. He will marry Lee Radziwill, Jackie Onassis' sister, on Sept. 23.

Linck says the cast was very happy with Natchitoches. "Shirley said the people were friendly without overstepping their bounds," he says.

"Dolly said it was like going back home for a vacation. Olympia loved the culture and learning about Kate Chopin and Clementine Hunter. She says she is supporting the Louisiana Repertory Theater they're trying to start here."

*Steel Magnolias* has a tentative late '89 release date.

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